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When global meets local:

Action learning, positionality and postcolonialism

Abstract

This paper explores changes in the positionality of Pakistani MBA students as they undergo an action learning (AL) intervention designed to encourage group reflection for the purpose of stimulating self-directed learning. Findings from this paper suggest that reflecting openly and challenging deep-seated beliefs in AL groups disrupts learner positionality, creating temporary misalignment with embodied cultural dispositions which shape social interactions and relationships. When applied in the context of Pakistani business schools, public reflection in AL groups creates dynamics resulting in three broad participant responses that trigger realignment with cultural norms: *dissonance*, *aversion* and *ambivalence*. As facilitators and educators, overlooking such responses to attempt empowering learners and encouraging self-direction can result in the unconscious reinforcement of power relationships that AL's critical practice seeks to challenge.

Keywords: action learning, positionality, group dynamics, culture, MBA education

Introduction

Globalization of business education has become a significant area of inquiry in recent academic literature (e.g. Abreu Pederzini & Suárez Barraza, 2020; Alajoutsijärvi et al. 2018 etc.). Although globalization is a multifaceted phenomenon, some studies (e.g. Joy & Poonamallee, 2013; Vakkayil & Chatterjee, 2017) point towards the impact on non-Western business schools which are often prompted to import Westernized practices including the adoption of rankings, accreditations, pedagogies, and partnerships, to become global. This ideology, however, mainly emanating from the West presents a series of challenges in the internationalization of business schools especially in the global South (Alcadipani & Faria, 2014). There are also concerns reported by some scholars around the adaptation of Western practices by postcolonial business schools in the global South, which often lead to producing competing outcomes in their quest for globalization (e.g. Kothiyal et al. 2018; Kumar, 2019). For example, some business schools have often found it paradoxical in conforming to international standards yet staying true to their locale (Vakkayil & Chatterjee, 2017)

Through analyzing the case of action learning (AL) on the Pakistani MBA using Bourdieu's vocabulary (Bourdieu, 1993; 1977), this paper addresses some of the aforesaid concerns that retrospectively reflect the pedagogic colonization of business schools in the global South (e.g. Kothiyal et al. 2018; Kumar, 2019). Being a powerful reflective and group-based pedagogy, AL was deliberately introduced with the intention of empowering Pakistani MBA students to attain self-direction and epistemological liberation as previously experienced by the author in a Western context. However, as the study progressed, it became apparent that AL was unable to sensitize itself towards the social, culture, political and historical processes that shape student practices and the Pakistani MBA education, thus revealing a complex and fractured relationship with the West. This paper, therefore, endeavors to advance dialogue on two frontiers: first, the rapprochement between global and local discourses from a postcolonial perspective (Vakkayil

& Chatterjee, 2017); and second, address the politics of pragmatic approaches such as AL's group reflection that seek to stretch the limits of consciousness through its questioning insight (e.g. Spicer et al. 2016).

While a postcolonial perspective is helpful in making sense of the betwixt colonial mindsets of Pakistani MBA students (e.g. Kothiyal et al. 2018), their responses reflect a continuous struggle between Western and non-Western practices (e.g. Sturdy & Gabriel, 2000; Shepard et al. 2008). The Pakistani MBA is an interesting pedagogic case to study because how Pakistani (students, teachers and managers) construct perceptions about the gender (men-women; others), dyadic relations (manager-employee; student-teacher) or their social orientation (openness, inclusion and inter-personal boundaries) are highly dependent on the diverse and discursive traditions of culture and religious thought (e.g. Khan & Koshul, 2011). Their social practice is constrained by subjective interpretations of cultural traditions that manifest not only within the public domain but also among political, social and familial networks which cultivate a variety of dispositions and responses towards West thereof (e.g. Sokefeld, 2005). Therefore, reflecting openly and questioning embodied practices or dispositions in AL groups is more likely to reinforce power-relations that AL's critical practice seeks to challenge (Vince, 2008).

For the convenience of readers, this article is divided into six sections. First, using a postcolonial lens, it locates Pakistani business schools at the intersection of a weakly linked global-local discourse, bringing to fore their fractured relationship with the West. Second, a critical review of the theoretical basis of AL is conducted which problematizes its application on the Pakistani MBA, thus highlighting the politics of culture. Third, the methodology is set-out which describes the ethnographic approach to capture participants' in-group positions before presenting findings in the fourth section. The fifth discusses participant responses when it comes to negotiating the practice of peer-to-peer questioning and collective reflection. It highlights the temporary misalignment with participants' embodied beliefs, resulting in having

to adopt one of three positions to restore social order: *dissonant*, *aversive* or *ambivalent*. Finally, a concluding section presents some closing thoughts, implications of AL's critical practice and future directions in group facilitation.

A postcolonial look at Pakistani business schools in the age of globalization

Following independence in 1947 by the British rule, Pakistan saw the development of business schools as early as 1950's with the help of US universities and the US Agency for International Development (USAID). While the role of American philanthropies in the internationalization of business education is prominent, Cooke and Kumar (2019: 5) argue that they disseminated a powerful scientific discourse of management thought and practice to establish US 'economic pre-eminence' in the global South. Ever since, business education in Pakistan has witnessed a gradual shift towards US style learning, bringing with it discourses of Westernization (e.g. Farhat-Holzman, 2012; Malik, 2012). However, the post-9/11 era, in which Pakistan played the role of ally in the US-led 'War on Terror' (Wildman & Bennis, 2010), perhaps prompted a decrease in the Americanization of Pakistani society for two reasons (e.g. Farhat-Holzman, 2012): First, this led to the demonization of Western thought amongst certain social classes (Ciftci, 2013). Second, despite Pakistan's intent to adopt a global approach by mimicking other, mostly US-based, business schools (e.g. Khan, 2007; Author, 20xx), the implementation of foreign ideas often met resistance from the sociopolitical and cultural forces prevailing within the country (Malik, 2012). As noted by Pasha (2000: 249), it reveals a paradoxical inclination of youth to pursue higher education 'without displaying an outward sign of accepting secular modes of life that congeals the contradictory aspects of modernity' within Muslim countries.

Comparable patterns are also noted in the context of business schools in India (e.g. Bell et al., 2017; Vakkayil & Chatterjee, 2017), the other nation-state that sought independence from British rule in 1947. Kothiyal et al. (2018: 138), in particular, view the oxymoron of globalization through a neocolonial perspective, where 'understanding of ongoing processes of

political, economic and cultural domination' are critical in shaping local practices. They argue that the colonization process, involving the colonized adopting certain ideologies of their colonizer, is complex and results in a legacy of reproducing (mimicking) discourses thereafter (Kothiyal et al., 2018: 12). This act of continuous adaptation is likely to result in a fractured relationship between the two, and perhaps leaves a void of imitation even after the colonizers leave (e.g. Ashcroft et al., 1998). Although mostly true in the case of Pakistan, there remains a divide amongst social classes who simultaneously show an appreciation for Western thought but also demonstrate the need to remain different (Malik, 2012; see also Boussebaa et al., 2014). This collision of ideologies can be seen as 'the interpenetration of the global and local' discourses (Ritzer, 2003: 193), and has the potential to create 'competing outcomes' (Vakkayil & Chatterjee, 2017: 329) for Pakistani business schools. In fact, this has created a hybrid discourse for academics and business schools, where the need to mimic Western practices continues to be seen as a sign of global progress (e.g. Priyadharshini, 2003). This is particularly evident in the adoption by non-Western business schools of texts and curricula that are deeply American (e.g. Khilji, 2001). Operating at the intersection of two competing fields, i.e. the global and local, Pakistani business schools are subject to 'various coercive, normative and mimetic pressures' of the Westernized world (Vakkayil & Chatterjee, 2017: 330). Therefore, this study can be regarded as a case that not only problematizes the pedagogic colonization of Pakistani business schools but also demonstrates a historical legacy of a paradoxical and fractured relationship with the West.

Problematizing action learning on the Pakistani MBA

Action learning (AL) is a way of developing emotionally, intellectually and socially that requires individuals to collectively (in groups) examine real-world problems (McCray et al., 2018). Originally conceived under the premise that 'there can be no learning without action and no (sober and deliberate) action without learning', Revans' (1998: 83) theorization of AL

hinges upon the interplay of action and reflection in the conversion of experience into practice. Revans (1998) posits that AL is driven by two factors: programmed knowledge (P) or internalizations, and the insight that results from questioning (Q) such 'knowledge'. Using this philosophy, AL has enjoyed success and achieved significant impact in Western contexts (e.g. Europe, North America) when trying to address a variety of social and organizational problems (Boshyk & Dilworth, 2010). Over the course of this section, I try problematizing two set of assumptions underpinning AL practice which I believe are deeply secular and neoliberal.

First, some studies suggest that AL has the power to '[lift] the lid and expose some of the less desirable and dysfunctional facets' of real life (Walton, 2014: 239). In this sense, AL is often identified as means to enhance capacity, raise otherwise unheard voices, illuminate knowledge gaps, and liberate the oppressed through the power of self-determination (e.g. Herbert, 2002; Fenwick, 2003). This is normally achieved by translating experience into action through modes of reflection (Raelin, 2001). Here, the use of experience is not merely a descriptive measure of an activity but emblematic of a pragmatic process to solve problems using reflective inquiry (e.g. Saltmarsh, 1996). If used critically, AL also presents an opportunity to empower learners (Fenwick, 2003) and redirect focus from the individual to the collective (Vince, 2008), where political and emotional tensions serve as bases for deeper learning (Rigg and Trehan, 2004). Although individuals have distinctive styles of learning, in which some are more dependent on P than Q, AL acts as a vehicle for reflection that involves a process of group inquiry into real-life problems (Reynolds, 2011). A key design consideration of AL is the facilitation of these groups (or sets), thus directing our attention towards the role and agency of the set facilitator. In the classical Revans-esque version of AL, a facilitator is someone who 'induces curiosity' but keeps their 'hands off the set' (Pedler, 2011: 79). This reflects the 'gold standards' of AL, as prescribed by Revans, in which groups must not 'be driven by facilitators who, by intervention, interfere with the self-organizing properties of the set' (Willis, 2004: 18).

Second, AL sets are often assumed to self-manage and organize within the group space, in which individuals interact and collectively reflect upon real problems (Marquardt & Yeo, 2012). This can be thought of as a space where ‘individuals negotiate a shared understanding of their social, emotional, cognitive and cultural world’ (e.g. Stone et al. 2012: 65–66) – a space defined by cultural historicity, where individuals’ partisanships, or embodied dispositions, interact to construct a meaningful view of their social world. In Revans’ conceptualization, AL sets seem to provide a similar space, in which members can interact with one another, question, and develop a shared understanding to progress through problems (Revans, 1998). Additionally, Revans metaphorically described group members as ‘comrades in adversity’ (1982: 720), a statement intended to capture the sense of ‘togetherness’ in the AL process (Vince, 2012). I believe what is problematic with this, especially from a non-Western perspective, is the implied sense of provocation, trust and equality to act and perform in the group space.

The Pakistani MBA is an interesting case for AL because it operates at the intersection of local and global discourses, acting as an interface for embedding and consuming knowledge produced by the West. At the moment, business schools within Pakistan show greatest tendencies to homogenize with the US style of learning (e.g. Kumar, 2019; Bell et al., 2017), which tends to simplify social complexity beneath layers of transnational discourses of managing the business enterprise (e.g. Starkey & Tempest, 2009). For example, such pedagogies convey a sense of management practice as apolitical and acontextual, having the capacity to be applied globally (e.g. Grey, 2004). In fact, these discourses have created conditions for globalization and the outreach of knowledge pertaining to the management of enterprises beyond Western frontiers (e.g. Buckley & Ghauri, 2004). To some degree, academics teaching on the Pakistani MBA play a significant role in contributing towards the adoption of Westernized ideologies (e.g. Abbas, 1993; Khan, 2007). These are agents who have

either been educated in the West or, through global networks, possess interests beyond the boundaries of the state (Sklair, 2015). They often think globally but act locally, creating a discrepancy in business school practices that only serve the interests of elites or elitist institutions (e.g. Alcadipani & Caldas, 2012).

Negotiating the politics of culture, positionality and criticality in action learning

A real dilemma in this study was of treading on the fine line between criticality which radically questions relations of authority and pragmatism that seeks to reconstruct those relationships in AL sets (e.g. Alvesson & Spicer, 2012: 375). This was most evident in group reflection processes on the Pakistani MBA where operationalizing the questioning insight to challenge the taken for granted assumptions was difficult to facilitate. Being a process that ‘challenges the kinds of assumptions that foster the inevitability of authoritarianism’, reflection can be a difficult transition for people who have embodied power-relations (Reynolds, 1998: 184). As noted by Trehan and Rigg (2005), questioning the subjective dimensions can, therefore, stimulate uneasy feelings that occurs when someone questions our values and beliefs. Given the passive nature of AL facilitation as advocated by Revans, watching how distinct phases of reflection unfolded in the AL sets were difficult to observe as a facilitator. Scholars (e.g. Leitch et al., 2009; Trehan & Pedler, 2011) argue that the role of facilitators within classical AL is unclear and requires a more active involvement in recognizing the group dynamics at play. As a theoretical variant of AL, critical AL (or CAL) offers some opportunity to reveal complex social relationships but requires active facilitation to manage ‘the political and emotional’ aspects of groupwork (Ram & Trehan, 2009: 313).

Taking account of the social complexity in Pakistan, reflecting openly is more likely to trigger changes in learners’ social positionality (e.g. Raelin, 2001). Learner positionality can be perceived as a reflection of an individual’s multiple social constructions of the self (e.g. gender, race, ethnicity, biography, and so on) that often shape the outcome of learning interactions and

relationships (Grimaldi et al. 2016: 142). To make sense of how learners are socially positioned in a learning intervention, England (1994) argues for situating individuals within their relational, political and cultural context which depict their everyday interactions. Studying learner positionality, in this case, offers an opportunity to examine in-group positional shifts during phases of collective reflection, which are often triggered as a result of being questioned (e.g. Vince, 2008). These shifts are more likely to occur in the AL group where social differences become prominent (or exposed) and threaten learner positionality (e.g. Yeadon-Lee, 2013). Group reflection can draw out such tensions between learners as they pose a threat to embodied and unquestionable power relations (Author, 20xx). Experiencing tensions can trigger movement of the learner from a position at the center of a group (as the subject and object of inquiry) towards its periphery, to avoid being exposed (e.g. Cunliffe, 2008; Reynolds, 1998). I argue that this shift mechanism is experienced more strongly in the Pakistani context, which can be classified in terms of its higher degree of social stratification, power distance, diverse ethnic and gender differences, language variations and religious dominance that inculcates a subservient learner position (Author, 20xx).

While some scholars (e.g. Rigg & Trehan, 2004) suggest that CAL addresses the shortcomings of classical AL by mobilizing ideas of critical theory to unearth power relations and facilitate change, others (e.g. Spicer et al. 2016; Wickert & Schaefer, 2015) argue that achieving any kind of social change can be a difficult task. This is mostly because of shortcomings and the passive application of criticality, which require local strategies that go beyond 'the cynical poise' that permeates much of critical studies (Spicer et al. 2009: 555). For example, a critical perspective can intensify emotions and politics when they are made the subject and object of discussion in AL groups (Vince, 2008) especially in a non-Western context. Through this viewpoint, empowering Pakistani MBA students by means of group reflection is more likely to push the cultural boundaries far apart (Author, 2018). Despite active facilitation that prompts

learners to participate, AL can become culturally alienating in which the learner is confronted by social tensions in a shared learning space (Rigg & Trehan, 2004). I argue that this can incapacitate learners as well as their facilitator, resulting in ‘in-action’ (Vince, 2008). For example, group reflection acts as a vehicle to focus on ‘the ways in which [dominant thought] is structured through social institutions, cultural norms and taken-for-granted practices’ of everyday life (Fram, 2004: 556). For Pakistani MBA students, their relationship with their facilitator, let alone their peers, is asymmetrical to begin with. Even with the critical turn in AL, there is an absence of literature around the politics of *criticality*, *culture* and the negotiation of learner *positionality* (Spicer et al. 2009; Authror et al. 2018). This paper, therefore, illuminates some of the local constraints in terms of how we enact and encourage critical practice in a field that is becoming increasingly global (e.g. Spicer et al. 2016).

Methodology

My approach to this study was informed by partial ethnography, which can be defined as ‘a process that follows the principles of ethnographic research, but in a less continuous way’ (Hibbert et al. 2016: 30). As Fetterman (2010) notes, it is the focus on the emic knowledge that makes ethnography a useful approach to study the richness and complexity of culture/cultural practices. Ethnography consists a two-fold research strategy: as a methodology, it involves a variety of field methods e.g. interviewing, focus groups and collective interviews, participant observations to allow ethnographers to observe participants in their natural habitat (e.g. Frey & Fontana, 1991; Suter, 2000); as a method, it encompasses a role of fieldwork – i.e. going out into the field and engaging with the context (Delamont, 2000). A partial deployment of ethnography allows researchers to use both the data collected (e.g. observational and interview) and personal experiences to guide the research / fieldwork process (Hibbert et al. 2016). The purpose here is not only to describe my experience as a facilitator of the AL groups, but also to use the empirical material (e.g. participant interviews, group observations and facilitator

notes) to gain deeper insights into the unfolding of AL group roles and positions during the participatory reflective process (e.g. Anderson, 2006: 387).

Site, sample and methods

This study draws on empirical data acquired through facilitator observations of four AL groups and the post AL reflections of 31 MBA student-participants within them, who frequently met together as a group over a 16-week period during their MBA dissertation module at three Pakistani business schools: East-city (EBS), Mid-city (MBS) and West-city business school (WBS); see Table 1 for a contextual description of the participating schools.

Table 1: Research sites and context

Research site	Context
EBS <i>East-city Business School</i>	The East-city Business School (EBS) was established in 2001 and is part of a public university set-up that operates in the area of Islamabad/Rawalpindi. EBS is part of a university that offers a range of study and research programmes and can be considered as a ‘general university’. EBS delivers high-quality business education to over 4000 business and management students enrolled in its six campuses across Pakistan. The Islamabad/Rawalpindi campus has almost 900+ students with a specialized faculty strength of 60+ academics. The Higher Education Commission and the National Business Education and Accreditation Council have ranked EBS as one of the top 10 public-sector university business schools in Pakistan.
WBS <i>West-city Business School</i>	The West-city Business School (WBS) was established in 2000 and is part of a private university set-up that operates in the twin cities of Islamabad/Rawalpindi. WBS is part of the first private multi-campus university in Pakistan to specialize in technical computing and engineering. The Higher Education Commission of Pakistan ranks the university in the top 10 private universities in computing/IT. WBS offers business education at four different campuses across Pakistan, with its flagship MBA programme in the federal capital.
MBS <i>Mid-city Business School</i>	The Mid-city Business School (MBS) was established in 2001 and forms part of a growing private sector university in Pakistan. The university rose to fame due to its focus on fashion design; however, it has also diversified itself to attend to the growing needs of other disciplines, such as business education, computer sciences, social sciences, developmental studies and engineering. MBS aims to provide business education to three different campuses across Pakistan.

At the outset, given the participatory nature of this study, negotiating access was difficult because research in Pakistani business schools is driven by sociological positivism. Largely, studies undertaken in social sciences across Pakistan involve research methods like surveys, experimental or quasi-experimental designs (Shami, 2008), making it difficult to negotiate access for an AL design-based ethnography. This left me seeking literature that illustrated how to persuade the gatekeepers. After having persuaded the Deans of three leading Pakistani business schools, who seemed interested in using AL as a way of dealing with the national and imperatives of MBA education (see NCRC, 2012), I was able to establish four AL groups by means of purposive sampling (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). Incorporating a dissertation phase into the Pakistani MBA, as part of the national curriculum revision, meant the completion of another six credit-hours with varying requirements, although every school required that students individually undertake a research project involving primary or secondary data under faculty supervision and submit a written project report. The addition of a dissertation phase in combination with research modules was focused on equating the MBA degree to foreign standards. Because these students did not have much experience of conducting research at undergraduate level, the AL sets could be regarded as a timely intervention. The AL sets, designed as reflective group spaces to support students during this phase (see Nicolini et al., 2004), comprised 27 full-time and five part-time students, with 22 males and nine females, and an age range of 23 to 34 years, divided into mixed-gender groups. The participants represented 14 different cities, which included almost all of the major provinces. The list of members in Table 2 represents an overview by pseudonym and gender. I supported all the AL sets as facilitator, which at times was challenging because the more I participated, the less attentive I was towards group dynamics.

Observations were collected through facilitator's handwritten notes (diary), supplemented by audio recordings of the AL set meetings and post-set interviews with the students. The data

also included facilitator's post-reflections on AL sets, which were captured through a reflective diary. Groups met every alternate week, with a pre-defined weekly topic agreed in advance. Each session had a planned topic, which the participants were informed about at the beginning of the AL programme in the form of a handbook (see Table 3 for a sample of topics).

Table 2: Research sample by gender (Male, Female) and set distribution

Set	1	2	3	4
School	EBS	EBS	MBS	WBS
	Haris M	Sam M	Maria F	Javid M
	Abraham M	Ahmed M	Elena F	Basim M
	Sarah F	Anyia F	Anita F	Haseeb M
	Haron M	Uzair M	Farrukh M	Rozie F
	Mohammad M	Dawood M	Hasan M	Rameez M
	Ali M	Kamran M	Tariq M	Sophia F
	Khan M	Amber F	Natasha F	Hosain M
	Zee M			Qadeer M
				Zayn M

Table 3: Sample topics discussed in AL sets

Sample topic	Sample structure
Managing Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selecting 1–2 potential problems or roadblocks • Developing a 5-minute presentation about the issue • Thinking about how the action learning set can help you
Planning your Research Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinking about your research area • Managing time and resources • Preparing for your research
Managing Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying and prioritizing key stakeholders • Role of stakeholders in shaping your research (project & process) • Working with stakeholders (challenges & opportunities)
Reading & Writing Research Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading and reviewing academic articles • Organizing and sequencing research • Challenges in writing-up • Reflective writing
Reviewing Progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual review of the action learning sets • Collective review and key takeaways • Facilitator's review of the set

At the beginning of each set meeting, members checked-in by personally contextualizing problems encountered or progress made between meetings, called the inter-meeting space (e.g.

Hughes & Bourner, 2005). Check-in was typically followed-up with phases of group reflection, where participants were invited to act as ‘critical friends’ and challenge a member with a problem or proposal (e.g. Kember et al., 1997). The sessions usually culminated in an action-planning activity in which members would list possible actions and action-takings before the next meeting. The activities in each session were mostly audio-recorded and observed by the facilitator through field notes and reflective accounts. At the end of the AL programme, each participant was interviewed to seek their post-reflection on the AL design and process in the form of a reflective, semi-structured interview with the researcher (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997).

Data analysis

An inductive strategy was employed to organize the data that was collected through observations and accounts of the participants and facilitator (e.g. Charmaz, 2003). The point of departure for analysis was group interactions and reflections, especially in terms of their AL experience. For analytical purposes, the data from the audio recordings and handwritten notes were translated and transcribed from Urdu to English. The transcripts then underwent a three-stage coding process – in-scripting, coding and recoding – to identify emerging themes in the data (Saldaña, 2013; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Managing the data, which involved multiple data sets (e.g. observations, interviews and field notes), was an arduous task. The organization of data sets involved a lot of housekeeping and tidying up as I progressed through the data-collection activity (e.g. LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). The resulting data structure was textual and wordy, mainly because of the multimethod qualitative approach (e.g. Brewer and Hunter, 1989) by which the data was captured – i.e. audio recordings and field notes (e.g. Ary et al., 2013); see Table 4 for details of the data sets. After collection of the data, it was thematically analyzed (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to produce a multidimensional view of members’ accounts, as key descriptors of their experiences, using a data-driven approach (e.g. Lewis & Ritchie, 2003; Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The emerging

themes were grouped together as patterns relevant to the study's questions regarding the AL experience (e.g. Lewis & Ritchie, 2003), and interpreted through 'thematic decomposition': 'a close reading which attempts to separate a given text into coherent themes [...] which reflect subject positions allocated to or taken up by a person' (Ussher & Mooney-Somers, 2000: 185).

Table 4: Data sets

Data set	Quantity
Set observations	32 observed events (handwritten & audio)
Post-set interviews	46.5 hours (audio); 830 pages of transcripts
Field notes	320 pages (handwritten)
Facilitator's reflective logs	47 (logs); 107 pages (handwritten)

The analytical strategy resonated well with methodological design, which in fact provided a way to locate the position of participants and the facilitator in AL sets. This was supplemented with Bourdieu's sociological concept of *position-taking* to help make sense of participant responses in AL's group space – a social space (or field) where agents are hierarchically positioned in a network of relationships (Bourdieu, 1977). What structures the social field is, in fact, the habitus – a universe of dispositions acquired as a result of an individual's socialization (familial or cultural upbringing) – that provides value to cultural capital (or knowledge) and establishes field rules or the logic of practice (Robinson & Kerr, 2018). Such theorization of AL sets offered three waypoints by which to triangulate member positionality, identifying: (i) how the AL space relates to the 'field of power'; (ii) what the nature of the relationships amongst participants is; (iii) how relations of power are constructed and actualized within a field (Grenfell, 2011: 177–179). Each theme was decomposed and translated into a position based on the relational topography of the AL sets and the positions taken by participants. The field logic (or norms) governing each AL space was taken into account to highlight the positioning of participants, for example, how positional power or powerlessness was expressed, felt or avoided (e.g. Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Finally, to explore group dynamics (e.g. Bourdieu, 1977), member positionality in the sets was compared

with the post-set reflections of participants, which considered their historical background, social and class trajectory, and dispositions acquired as a result of their cultural citizenship.

Findings: Accounts of AL practice on the Pakistani MBA

The presentation of findings is organized under three thematic categories, which broadly correspond to the positions adopted by action learners during the different phases of AL group reflection. I consider these positions as responses to challenging of the embodied cultural beliefs and values, which have been internalized as a result of one's socio-localization. Generally, accounts are indicative of experiencing contradiction in learner positionality in AL groups which created dispositional stress due to cultural misalignment, provoking a shift in the in-group positions of participants. While these positions are perceived as on-going and dynamic struggles (Bourdieu, 1977), they offer a snapshot of participants' local as opposed to preferred global (neo-colonial) position, envisaged by the author/facilitator as challenging and the challenger of accepted truths. These positions, represented as position-takings (Bourdieu, 1993), are responses to the temporary misalignment with cultural pre-dispositions that encapsulate remedial work in the form of 'repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising' one's position that is productive of a distinctive and coherent sense of self (Svenningsson & Alvesson, 2003: 1165). They encompass participants' lived experiences, emotions and perceptions as reflected within the group space of AL, where the reflexive self is seen to be caught at the intersection of a global-local discourse, forcing participants to realign with accepted cultural norms.

Dissonance

The first position, *dissonance*, reflects the power of group enquiry and questioning insight in unsettling participants' embodied beliefs during their social interactions. Research suggests that reflection in group settings can be seen as an 'anxiety-provoking' experience (Trehan &

Rigg, 2005: 18), generating a crisis-like situation. Challenging normalized ways of learning or being through reflection can provoke an enhanced sense of self-reflexivity, thus stimulating emotions (i.e. emotional dis-positions) that are a pre-reflexive response to dealing with a changing situation (Bourdieu, 1977), thereby causing dissonance.

Across the sets, most of the participants' accounts described dissonance, which highlights their struggle to overcome interpersonal boundaries that govern the act of questioning. One such example was around gendered beliefs. Thus, in his post-set interview Khan, a participant from Set 1, said he had never before experienced such a learning style nor been placed in a position where people wanted to direct questions at him, especially females. This was particularly felt more strongly in AL sets because Khan was put in a position to interact with students of the opposite sex. He informed during his interview that his inability to communicate with females is not uncommon as other students from rural parts of the KP (Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa) province in Pakistan mostly feel challenged. This is due to cultural barriers he said. Recalling his early days, Khan further added that he's been in an MBA environment for almost 2 years and still adjusting to interaction across genders. He recalls his AL set experience as follows:

"The only thing I could say was hello [asalam – o – ali'kum] and that was it. I couldn't say any more after this. I had that pressure of girls and boys sitting in a room listening to me. It was my first time addressing people, especially girls I didn't know of. [...]" (*Khan, Set 1 – Interview*)

Similarly, another participant from Set 1, Sarah expressed some psychological distress and emotional discomfort towards questions asked by male members, which from a facilitator's view were not as critical. In her interview, she indicated that she had been educated in a girl's only school with minimal interaction from men, whereas the AL sets were mixed-gender groups (Author, 20xx: xx). She expressed other men as overstepping interpersonal boundaries:

"being the only female in the group [...] I got really nervous when people challenged me by asking questions. I felt overwhelmed. I wanted everyone to stop. Honestly, I just wanted to run away" (*Sarah, Set 1 – Interview*)

The changing gender dynamics of the group stood in contradiction to her beliefs as a Pakistani woman. Both Khan and Sarah, educated in gender-specific schools felt discomfort in interacting, reflecting or asking questions. When, Khan, was asked as to why he did engage with women participants, he echoed other men in the group by saying ‘it is impolite to direct questions at a lady’. Under the guise of reverence, gender issues can be suppressed and more importantly the voice of women can become marginalized. Although, Sarah was the only woman participant, in an eight-member set, she was already subjected to limited interaction from others (men).

The explanations provided by men in the groups in relation to cross-gendered questioning during public reflection were extremely thought-provoking, challenging the ethos surrounding questioning insight in group cultures where gendered/social relationships precede learning (e.g. Hosking, 2011). This ethos was perceived by participants to have been the most important element in how this process unfolded. Thus, one such aspect of the questioning process was the need to address members of the opposite sex with caution. As expressed by Zayn, a member of Set IV, this sense of cautiousness conveys the depth of how what is spoken and how it is spoken can affect group relationships between genders. This is also evident in the works of Farhat-Holzman (2012), who describes the religious challenges of modernization. In Zayn’s interview, he stated that it was not easy to question women in the AL set, even in private institutions like WBS that are considered non-conservative in their culture, that is, open to people from liberal and higher classes of society. When asked why it was difficult to address the women in the set, Zayn said:

We’re living in an Islamic culture and there are some regulations on the basis of gender. We need to be very careful while talking to a female. When talking to a male, we can talk as we like, for example, can be challenging or aggressive, but when talking to a female we need to follow certain guidelines, obligations and rules so, as such, they [learners] were also my [MBA] class fellows but still there were some unspoken limitations that we needed to be careful about ... what and how we are talking to them. (*Zayn, Set IV - Interview*)

The segregation of men and women in AL sets was not just a matter of the treatment of women by men, which is mainly through ways like deference or respect. It's also an issue of how cultural upbringing. Also, the implications of questioning are not limited to an individual's existence or beliefs but extend itself to the entire system of beliefs upon which their culture hinges. The role which religion plays does seem to have been part of many interview conversations, which emphasized caution to be taken while addressing members of the opposite gender. Another implication of the questioning process is the defensiveness arising from the emotionally charged character of participants, who in their own ways address their feelings e.g. fear, uncertainty, frustration etc. When emotions are running high, Haris, another participant from set 1, suggested that it was essential to understand that "words carry weight", having the possibility of being misunderstood, causing issues which can lead to confrontation.

Aversion

The second position shows why emotions and feelings that may cause dissonance result in an aversion of questioning-insight, in order to maintain group relations during the process of reflection. Thus, participants often resorted to strategically positioning themselves during group reflection to avoid questioning their peers. In the Pakistani MBA, this aversion to questioning and the fear associated with challenging embodied assumptions (and relationships), as demonstrated in the context of the preceding position of dissonance, is regarded as 'the most arduous of all the steps in the reflection process, because identifying and questioning assumptions goes against the [cultural] grain' (Hammer & Stanton, 1997: 296, cited in Vince, 2002: 67). Such questioning exposed the fragility of relationships and influenced members' interpersonal interactions in the AL sets (Reynolds, 2011).

Analysing my field notes from the AL sets, it was clear that public reflection played a key role in exposing group relations, which further led to the emergence of 'strategic politics':

respecting power position in relationships that bear cultural and historical significance to avoid interaction or crossing boundaries (Vince, 2004: 66). The strategies deployed by participants to alleviate the (emotional) discomfort caused by questioning insight, as categorized by Vince and Martin (1993: 210), broadly fell into that of ‘willing ignorance’ to avoid situations that would expose power relations between them. Thus, one post-set reflective comment, recorded after my second meeting at EBS, reads as follows:

“... the participants seem uncertain about how this questioning insight combined with intermittent phases of reflection works. Their disjointed questions, awkwardly long pauses and their struggle to organize their ideas could be associated with their difficulty in coming to terms with this design element. However, I think this is mainly because when I explained critical reflection, unfortunately, it could not be neatly translated into language to which they are accustomed. I think their quizzical looks were mostly anticipated but their avoidance of being put in a position either to be asked a question or to pose one is something that I hadn’t really thought of entirely ... (Facilitator’s post-set reflection, Meeting 2, Field Note 6)”

An explanation for this reflection might be found in Simpson et al. (2000), who suggest that the ‘overpowering’ experience of working with the ‘unknown’ usually results in disengagement from the process of learning. They further note that the limiting factor in learning could be causes of ‘uncertainty’, ‘which is stimulated by facing the experience of not-knowing’ (Simpson et al., 2000: 486). The uncertainty associated with the critical reflection process can often be painful and disorienting because it has a tendency to ‘touch participants’ emotions’ (Trehan & Rigg, 2005: 18). An intensive approach such as critical reflection has the potential to become challenging for participants, as Vince (2008) suggests, because it questions their tightly held beliefs and reveals power relations.

The tendency to show reverence or respect to individuals in power positions, i.e. based on social class or gender role, could be attributed to participants’ formative development. Analysing their predispositions embodied within their habitus as part of their cultural and social upbringing played a critical role in how relationships were enacted in the learning sets. This also highlights a legacy of colonialism and the fractured relationship Pakistan has with the

West, one that is deeply rooted and informed by the discursive traditions of culture and faith. In this respect, the MBA participants depicted various (pre)dispositions that exhibited the role of cultural arbitraries (legitimizers of knowledge) in amplifying their cultural habituation (e.g. teachers, parents or social influencers).

Taking an example, I reflect over Ahmed and Khattak's (participants' from EBS ALS II) brief account who indicate how cultural arbitraries shaped their habitus during formative years. During his recollection, Ahmed expressed how his father, a local artist, *madrassah* (Islamic seminary), and school acted as cultural arbitraries in endowing him with certain dispositions towards learning. One day his father than took him out of the school based in his village and registered him in a *madrassah*, an Islamic seminary. His time at this seminary was challenging as he was subject to differentiation by others at this place for knowing English language. Ahmed recalls how his earlier experiences have shaped his mindset about learning in AL sets:

“I think I was the only one coming in from an English medium [school]. I was a foreigner to them [children in seminary]. They looked down upon me with a bad eye.” (*Ahmed, EBS, Set II, Interview*)

Khattak's case is interesting in explaining how a downward-levelling culture enforces norms that shape his habitus and relations with others in the social domain. In his interview account, he indicated that after schooling, in a KP village, he was sent off to Peshawar (provincial capital of KP in Pakistan). Khattak described his move to Peshawar for his undergraduate as significant, despite the region-specific values of KP (e.g. secluded female culture etc.).

Growing up he was able to recall that the culture had so much influence on him that he wore local clothes to school and college (i.e. Shalwar, Kameez – local dress). When someone wore pants-shirt, he was teased to be an English gentleman. He continued that he was brought up in a segregated society (similar to Khan's account earlier) where males and females are kept apart even in schools and occasions of marriage etc. Khattak's move to pursue an MBA in a co-educational institution, however, does not mean an abandonment of his cultural values but

a legacy shaping his actions in AL sets. Throughout the group meetings, I wasn't able to find any direct interaction of Khattak with the any female participant in the group. When I asked about his reserved behaviour in the AL sets, he said:

“As I told you earlier, I don't talk much. Actually, I have come from a background where I have been asked to keep to myself, I mostly live alone. The time I spend with friends, whenever I feel like talking, then I talk. [...] In the sets when an idea came, I spoke, when it didn't occurred to me I stayed quiet. [...] Because the way the group was working, it was unusual and awkward. It demanded that you give a lot of respect to others. There was a very fine line between where you got personal and where you leave the space for others” (*Khattak, EBS, Set II, Interview*)

Ambivalence

The third position, *ambivalence*, outlines the effects of the reflective process on participants outside of the AL sets. My interviews with the Pakistani MBA participants revealed inherent tensions and contradictions that have emerged in the pedagogical context as a result of introducing reflection to the AL sets. The findings suggest that how participants have been predisposed to traditional forms of learning creates a tension with, and complicates, the reflective process of AL practice. These findings reflect what McWilliams (2012: 228) notes as ‘pedagogical ambivalence’, a term which refers to the ‘events, in which there is an expression to challenge social practices’, but which are downplayed by the surrounding culture, causing tensions. A similar finding, reported by Kothiyal et al. (2018), suggests that the experience of ambivalence occurs when non-Westerners are asked to mimic Western thinking that can never be fully imitated.

Recognizing this unease (contradictions and tensions), an excerpt from the interview with Sarah (Set 1, EBS) demonstrates how difficult it was for her to follow through on the pieces of feedback she received in the sets:

“When I left the set, I was overwhelmed [...]. I just wanted to kick-start my own project without thinking about anything else. But I wasn't sure where I would start. I gave it some thought and finally started working... when I next met my supervisor again, I got confused. As I told you earlier, she asked me to select a topic from the table of contents and I did. After

our repeated set meetings, I got information from here and there to refine my idea. But when I met with my supervisor, she told me something else and I ended up being confused. I wasn't sure what to do. I really had to find a way to complete my project and let the supervisor be happy. So, I molded it [the project] according to her [the supervisor's] expectations." (Sarah, Set 1, Interview)

Sarah is pointing to a dichotomous practice that seemed to create a divide between what AL was encouraging and what the supervisor was advising. But she also notices the difference between AL and her MBA class learning as:

"I think the MBA classroom is different to the action learning set. The focus is more on the teacher there, as they possess more knowledge" (Sarah, Set 1, Interview)

This outlines not only the difference but also the need for having experts to lead the learning process. The challenge here was that the participants were willing to try, but their effort had to be materialized under the gaze of pedagogues who were a product of the prevailing cultural environment. This exposes the challenges that a learner can face in terms of the disparity between two pedagogic modes – one aims at empowering and other mitigates its effects. The ambivalence is noticeable and is created by the power differentials and the cultural capital that Sarah carries with her and with which she complies, given the asymmetrical power relationship with her supervisor.

Ambivalence can also be experienced when reflection in AL sets causes individuals to become more conscious of who they are. For example, Rozie, a WBS participant, described in one of her final AL meetings how when she had started working on her research project (prior to the AL sets) it had all seemed very interesting. But afterwards, having gone through several phases of self-reflection, she had come to understand her reality as a Pakistani woman and the challenges associated with that identity. Despite showing respect to women in Pakistan, which can also be construed as a way to marginalize their voice as illustrated in the second position (above), it has also been embodied to an extent that challenging such ideals of gender emancipation can become feelings of disempowerment for individuals. Rozie expresses this as:

“At the beginning I felt very confident; for instance, what I was doing is one of the difficult types of [research] projects at the university. When this is over, I have been offered [the opportunity] to convert this into a case study, which I am going to write with Dr [XYZ], and this is going to be published and used by academics in Pakistan. You see the thing is that, in Pakistan, local case studies are rarely published; what we do is we refer to Harvard. So, doing a qualitative case study on our local organizations can inform on what is actually happening in our own country. However, it later dawned on me, how would I be able to do this type of a research project? How would I access this [cement] factory? Who do I refer to? I hardly think there would be any females working there. Also going alone and interviewing them, I am not sure if that is an entirely great idea, and that too on the factory floor. (Rozie, Set 4, AL Meeting)”

After the AL sets, I asked Rozie what made her feel so anxious about AL and why she felt this way; she replied: ‘I am really afraid of reflecting [in AL sets], because when I reflect, I realize how fragile I am’.

Discussion

The findings in this study highlight how Pakistani MBA students, as action learners, position, perform and respond to the pragmatic, liberal and secular ideals of AL practice in a non-Western, Muslim, postcolonial context. They specifically provide insight into the responses involved in maintaining a coherent sense of self that seeks to uphold the social (local) order (Svenningsson & Alvesson, 2003). A critical interpretation of findings reaffirm the precarious relationship Pakistani MBA has with the West, which hovers at the intersection of a weakly linked global-local discourse creating competing outcomes for students (Frenkel, 2008). These outcomes expose the cultural doxa – or the underlying unquestionable beliefs (Bourdieu, 1977), shaping learner positions that are enacted by means of embodied practice. In this study, participants showed a paradoxical interplay of acceptance-resistance towards fully embodying certain Western beliefs and yet staying true to their original ideals (e.g. Vakkayil & Chatterjee, 2017). By using Bourdieu’s notion of *position-taking* along with a postcolonial lens, in this section, I argue that encouraging critical dialogue with Pakistani MBA students without taking consideration of the social, cultural or historical legacy only reinforces colonial and power-relations (e.g. Kothiyal et al., 2018; Spicer et al. 2016). Drawing upon Bourdieu’s idea of

habitus, findings indicate that formative experiences of schooling or upbringing are grounded within varied discursive traditions of religion and culture (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). During the participatory process of AL, overstepping embodied beliefs, socially ascribed norms and interpersonal boundaries was construed problematic and experienced as disempowering. The act of group reflection only managed to ‘complexify the habitus’, of those who were unwilling/unable to relegate their historical legacy, making it challenging for operationalizing a critical narrative that resists power relations (Abreu Pederzini & Suárez Barraza 2020: 44).

The legacy of postcolonialism remains evident in how participants responded by way of being *ambivalent*, *aversive* or *dissonant*. For instance, overtly questioning the existing norms, logic and practices of business schools destabilizes the identities of learners, which in turn affects their positionality and relationships in AL (e.g. Kothiyal et al., 2018). Announcing a pedagogy of action (e.g. Dehler, 2009) as a way to empower and attain self-direction on the Pakistani MBA appeared to threaten the ‘established power structures’ by means of questioning insight. This not only exposed local cultural dispositions but also made visible the doxa of criticality (Reynolds, 2011: 11; Bourdieu, 1977; Spicer et al. 2009). The counter-knowledge produced through AL, having the tendency to redefine subjective positions, stood in opposition to the embodied dispositions that shapes interpersonal relations and positionality (e.g. Kalfa & Taksa, 2015). Thus, destabilizing embodied experiences and/or deep-seated beliefs and disrupting social mechanisms causes learners to redefine (or re-confirm) their positions in the AL sets, mainly to avoid socio-political discomfort or anxiety (Vince, 2008). As in this case, pushing the limits of orthodoxy to become progressive can provoke ‘contradictory forces’ (Willmott, 1994: 127) and, given AL’s questioning insight, authority relationships can change individual positions or legitimize power relations (e.g. Reynolds & Vince, 2004).

Apart from contextualizing the complex historical, political, social and economic processes that shape AL practice, the findings make three distinct contributions reflecting issues that need

to be considered when seeking to empower people in Pakistan and contexts alike. Firstly, acquiring local understanding of how power-relations manifest in groups and are likely to shape learner positionality. The focus needs to be on the inculcation of dispositions embodied during one's upbringing, for example, making sense of gendered discourse among participants and knowing local constraints that limit interactions with one another. Also, making connections with the broader social context is critical as it sheds light on historical legacies, like in the case of Pakistani MBA and its Muslim postcolonial identity. Findings also outline the ways in which certain existing MBA structures operate, which reproduce social inequalities in everyday pedagogies, despite trying to become 'global' (Vaara & Fay, 2011): Pakistani business schools thrive on pedagogies that have been borrowed from the West, especially the US (e.g. the positivist, functionalist and technicist discourses of Anglo-American institutions) which often suppress power relations under the guise of neutrality or globalization (Khan, 2007; Grey, 2004; Alajoutsijärvi et al. 2018).

Secondly, recognizing the revelatory effects and performativity of pragmatic approaches like reflective practice in exposing the underlying doxa (e.g. Bourdieu, 1977) – or embodied beliefs that contest and push back the limits of critical thought (or heterodoxy) (Author, 20xx). Heterodoxy, like AL's questioning insight, draws attention to the taken-for-granted assumptions that manifest in Pakistani business schools and results in the 'awakening of political consciousness' (Bourdieu, 1977: 170). From a critical perspective, McLaughlin and Thorpe (1993: 25) note CAL's potential in making participants aware of the 'primacy of politics, both macro and micro, and the influence of power [...] not to mention the mobilization of bias'. It can, however, 'open up an appreciation of, and sensitivity towards, darker aspects' of life which can potentially dis-empower individuals (Willmott, 1997: 170).

Thirdly, acknowledging the misalignment between the dominant global practices of MBA education, local Pakistani culture and AL's secular pedagogic beliefs that create dissonance

amongst learners. The unfamiliarity of working with critical and group enquiry reveals the politics of global, local and pragmatic discourses and their contradictory interrelationship (Spicer et al. 2009; Author et al. 2018; Vakkayil & Chatterjee, 2017). As Nicolini et al. (2004: 113) put it: 'herein lies a powerful practical lesson. Designing and organizing reflective activities and promoting them in such a way [...] exposes a paradox of reflection being promoted at one level and denied at another'. The factor underpinning success or failure for AL in the context of the Pakistani MBA, as evidenced in this study, is the lack of consensus between global and local discourses. Although consistent with other postcolonial studies (Kothiyal et al., 2018; Abreu Pederzini & Suárez Barraza 2020), this study suggests that learners are reflective in their own ways, they develop an appreciation of their real-world problems but are trapped in their own positions (and subjectivities) which can reinforce power-relations consciously or otherwise.

Concluding thoughts

As a Western-educated Pakistani, this study presents a contradiction in my own practice, in which I seem to have taken for granted my newly acquired (critical, Western) habitus, which stands in contrast to the one I had embodied during my upbringing (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). My way of looking at gender conventions and asymmetric power relations, for example, have been polished by the West and a break in such perceptions has been considered as failure in this study. To a large extent, my world view has been violated by the participants in their efforts to openly reflect, demonstrate and enact values that contrast with the contemporary canons of Western secular liberalism. From my own perspective, and in the context of the knowledge about critical management studies that I have acquired, my intervention seems to have failed, with the local doxa prevailing in the end. In trying to use AL to encourage learners to question their embodied dispositions and become self-directed, the social conditions created

a powerful pushback in such a way that they reinforced post-colonial order. Far from liberating Pakistani MBA students, it produced competing outcomes (e.g. power and domination), causing local values to be felt more strongly.

Looking back, the habitus of Pakistani MBA students remains deeply ingrained in its socio-historical legacy and cultural values despite the figurative mask of Westernization (Abreu Pederzini & Suárez Barraza, 2020). Encouraging my participants to openly reflect in AL groups and break away from colonized practices awakened the political consciousness only to result in anxiety about their new-found (critical) positions. Their postcolonial legacy, filled with global discourses at the surface, yet deeply local, conflicted with AL practices that questioned deep-seated beliefs, and as such triggering position-taking (e.g. Wild et al., 2020). While reflective in their own ways, I believe position-taking was felt more intensely with the exposition of embodied beliefs which created a critical paradox that's not only cynical of Western discourses but also of criticality as well (e.g. Spicer et al. 2009).

The learner positions identified in this study, however, have implications for academics and facilitators in organizing AL in the global South or contexts alike. They suggest a need to become more sensitive towards the subjective positioning of learners. A collective pre-AL session or start-up interviews might be a useful strategy to get to know participants and to acquire a feel for the prevailing doxa i.e. to make sense of the local habitus and field. The organization of reflection can be an intensive process in a collective setting, which exposes inner conflicts and contradictions as noted above, and makes learners more likely to resort to coping strategies that can prevent action and learning (Vince, 2008: 102). Therefore, as noted in a similar study, Author et al. (20xx) suggest proactive facilitation to negotiate the cultural politics that shapes social interactions and relationships. However, in the present study, my attention is directed towards the positionality of members, in terms of their gender and

asymmetric position, which have been embodied through subjective means. Thus, challenging the gender power relation, for example, can instigate discomfort and disorientation.

Through this study, I have also come to realize that engendering a habitus, which is reflectively empowering, not only means becoming aware of what may previously have been hidden under layers of cultural ideologies (or doxa), but also being sensitive to the influence of social practices on critical awareness of one's position (e.g. Cunliffe, 2018). The findings of this study are beneficial to facilitators in revealing how the dynamics of global and local discourses can create misrecognition of beliefs that are otherwise not held. As Bourdieu says, 'power relations are perceived not for what they objectively are but in [a] form which renders them legitimate in the eyes of the beholder' (Bourdieu, 1977: xiii). Therefore, it is imperative for educators in the global South to consider the complex interaction of global and local discourses and their impact on learners' positionality without drifting into fantasies of liberation. Finally, my work should be read as a critique of the self, coming to grief at the hands of a contextually deviant discourse portrayed by the West as promising liberation from power struggles and oppression: in the hope of empowering Pakistani MBA students to attain self-direction, I unconsciously ended up legitimizing the structural inequalities that exist beneath the mask of postcolonialism.

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